What Is an APA-Style Essay?

APA (American Psychological Association) style is used mostly for writing in the social sciences, but especially in psychology courses. In documenting sources, APA style emphasizes authors and the dates their works were published. Everything in your paper, including the title page, should be double-spaced, 12-point Times New Roman.

An APA paper usually has four parts:
1. Title page
2. Abstract
3. Body of the paper with sources cited in APA format
4. Reference page with sources listed (instructor requirements may vary)

1. Title Page

For only the title page (select “different first page” to format the header), type “Running head:” before the TITLE IN ALL CAPITALS (Stop at 50 characters, even if title is longer.)

Use a right-aligned tab in the ruler to insert the page number 1.

Centered in the middle of the page: Full Title—Capitalize all words except for FANBOYS or prepositions that are four or fewer letters. A “the” or “a” is capitalized only if it is the first word of a title.

Your Name
Your School’s Name

Centered near the bottom: “Author Note”

Left aligned, indented half an inch: the course name, section, and instructor name.

Figure 1. Example of APA Title Page
FOR ALL PAGES AFTER THE TITLE PAGE, format the header as follows:

The title (up to 50 characters) in all CAPITALS on the left margin, page numbers on the right margin.

2. Abstract

An abstract is a short summary of your paper, generally only 150 to 250 words. An abstract is often optional in student papers, but if one is part of your assignment, write it after you have composed your paper. Put it on page two, separate from the rest of the paper.

Format of the abstract:

Center “Abstract” at the top of the page.

The first line of the abstract is not indented.

All text is in a single, left-aligned, double-spaced paragraph (150-200 words)
3. Body of Paper

The margins are 1" from the top, bottom, left and right edges of the paper.

Begin your paper with your Full Paper Title centered (NOT in bold text), follow capitalization rules as in Full Title from title page.

All new paragraphs, indent ½", with no extra space between paragraphs.

Center the major section headings (for example, Method, Results, and Discussion) in boldface type. The same capitalization rules apply as for the paper title. Subsection headings may be left aligned.
In-text Citations (How to Incorporate Sources into Your Text)

APA style requires internal citation, always giving the author’s or authors’ last name(s) and the date of publication. However, unlike MLA style, you only need to include a page number when you use a quotation. You can cite your sources different ways in your text, but you should use signal phrases as much as possible, especially if you use quotations from sources that don’t have page numbers.

A. Being Clear About Who Says What

The first time you introduce a text, give the full name and credentials of the author or authors (X), the title of the work and the year it was published in a signal phrase. You may also name the genre of the work (article from famous newspaper, trade journal, academic journal, TED Talk, university course website, conference presentation, etc.). The verbs should use past or past perfect tense:

“In his/her YEAR genre, “Title,” X argued that__________________.”

Example:

B. Templates for Introducing Quotations in APA Style

- X (YEAR) stated, “______” (p. ###).
- As the prominent philosopher X (YEAR) put it, “______” (p. ###).
- According to X and Y (YEAR), “______” (p. ###) --use for sources with two authors
- In X’s (YEAR) view, “______” (p. ###).
- X (YEAR) agreed/disagreed when she wrote, “______” (p. ###).
- Researchers have complicated matters further by saying, “______” (X & Y, YEAR, p. ###).

C. Templates for Introducing Challenges to What X Says in APA Style

- A number of sociologists (Y, YEAR; Z, et al., YEAR) have recently suggested that X’s (YEAR) work has several fundamental problems.
- It has become common to dismiss X’s contribution to the field of sociology (Y, YEAR; Z, YEAR).
- In YEAR, Y and Z offered harsh critiques of Dr. X for _____.

You can place the authors’ names, the date, and the page number (if you use a quotation and your source has page numbers) in parentheses at the end of the sentence:

Researchers even went so far as to assert that the partying styles of college students “had a direct effect on grades” (Kahn & Shahili, 2002, p. 1513).

For long quotes of more than 40 words:

Entire passage is indented ½ inch, double spaced, without quotation marks.

Page number in parentheses after the period at the end of your quote. (###)
4. Reference Page

Beginning on a separate page after your body of the paper, center the title “References” at the top, then list your resources alphabetically by author last name.

Double space all entries, but with hanging indents of ½ inch. (A hanging indent is when the first line of a paragraph is against the left margin, but subsequent lines are indented.)

Methods of creating hanging indents vary according to which word processing application you are using.

All authors’ names are listed by family name, then initials; if a source has more than one author, separate the names with commas, and put an ampersand (&) before the last author. For works by many authors, list up to seven of them; if there are eight or more, list the first six, then follow with an ellipsis ( . . . ) and the last author’s name.

References

